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Urueu-Wau-Wau

Profile

Urueu-Wau-Wau are a small group comprising fewer than 1,000 hunter gatherers in the state of Rondonia who have a single continuous area demarcated as a reserve. They are also known as Uru-Eu-Wau-Wau (by the Oro-Uari), Jupaú, Amondaua, Black-Mouths, Cautários, Sotérios and Red-Head. Their language is Kawahib (Kagwahiva or Kawahiwa) and is part of the Tupi-Guarani family. The community is located in the Pacaás Novos and Uopianes mountain ranges.

Historical context

Urueu-Wau-Wau were contacted by the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI) in 1981 when the area was opened up by the road-building and colonization promoted by the World Bank-funded Polonoroeste project. After that their population decreased dramatically to less than 1,000. Besides conflict with invading settlers and miners, it is estimated that more than half the population fell victim to diseases introduced by outsiders.

Rubber interests prevented the acceptance of demarcation of their lands decreed by FUNAI. In 1991, one of the largest deposits of tin in the world was discovered in this already intensively mined area, which has been invaded by gold miners expelled from Yanomami lands. In addition, the Institute of Colonization and Land Reform has granted lands to illegal colonists.

Current issues

Missionaries are increasing their activities in the community and the local NGO Kanindé has worked to fight against outside influences in the community. The community has limited access to health care and as a result viral and bacterial infections are common. The health condition of the community has been brought to the attention of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and there are nascent government programmes to address the concerns of the Urueu-Wau-Wau.

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